

Tape #008

RUSS MONTGOMERY

Interviewer: Mike Brown

Date: 22 August 1977

Mike Brown (MB): This is an interview with Mr. Russ Montgomery, 490 E. Main Street, Vernal, Utah. Today is the 22nd of August 1977. This is Mike Brown of the Golden Age Center.

Russ Montgomery (Russ): Well, I was born on the west side of Meeker, Colorado, in 1897, October 19, 1897, the son of Henry Clay Montgomery and Sophia Frances Burkenbine Montgomery, one of five children.

When I was a year old, Father told Mother and I, and my brother Howard, who was two and a half years old, and my brother Bill, who was about seven, we had to go to Colorado with a team of mules. We camped along the road. Then he put Mother and I and Howard on the train, and he and brother Bill, who was seven years old, rode back to Iowa with a team of mules. I remember Bill telling about it several times. He said when it come noon, them mules would just pull off the side of the road and wouldn't go any farther until you fed them. They're quite an animal.

Well, then, when I was six years old, we moved about twenty miles down below Meeker on a ranch. Father was down about ten miles below. He and my brother Bill [were] a-fishing, and my brother Howard and I got in the house and got his old Colt .45. That was a big, wicked old gun. Of course, in those days a fellow always kept them loaded and he used to carry it in a shoulder holster, here. We took the bullets out except one. We thought we had them all out. I was the robber and he was the sheriff. He chased me down to an old three-day meat box that we used to have our meat in. He snapped that gun in my face four or five times. Every time he snapped it, the cylinder would turn. He came out with that live shell and I bet sometimes he had that pointed right between my eyes.

Well, it went off and hit me there, come out right back there, filled both eyes full of powder and the face. It was right in the face, you see. The gun kicked and cut a hole in his head up here with the hammer. He took off for the cedars. My mother come down. She heard the shot and made me cross a little irrigation ditch. I couldn't see very well 'cause my eyes were full of powder. Then she led me up to a ranch about a mile or two above there and left me with an old Irishman. She got on a horse and rode down to where Father was fishing. They said when they saw her coming, riding fast, they knew something was wrong. So she rode up and told I was shot.

My father, he got a good horse and took off for Meeker. That would be about thirty miles. He rode through Powell Park, this side of Meeker a little. They said the horse was just white with lather. Well, I think it happened about nine in the morning and Dr. O'Bell come down about dark with a team and buggy. No cars in those days. Laid me down in bed and cleaned this wound out here, dressed it and took all the powder he could out of my face and eyes. Put a bandage over my eyes. I laid there in the bed a couple of weeks.

There used to be an old cat would come up and lay down beside of me. I'd pet her and she'd purr. I got a lot of pleasure out of that. After a couple of weeks they took me to Meeker in a team and wagon. We stayed with some friends of ours by the name of Burditz. The doctor took the bandage off then. They had a kerosene lamp, the light shined and hurt my eyes. So they put a paper to keep it from shining directly into my eyes. That was quite an experience for a six-year-

old boy. That was the same year that David Nicken was assassinated, 1903. No, McKinley, wasn't it? McKinley. [Editor's note: Montgomery is apparently referring to President William McKinley, who was assassinated in 1901.]

Well, we lived down there a couple of years. My little brother Bill was seven and my Uncle Dick was a-fishing, and this year the White River was real high. I was just six years old and I went down there to get a drink. I laid down and I slid off into the water. The current picked me up, threw me around, took me down to the bottom. Came to the top, threw me around, took me down to the bottom a second time and the third time they say you don't come up. My brother Bill jumped in and pulled me out, turned me upside down and drained the water out of me, spanked me and sent me home.

MB: Spanked you after you almost drowned?

Russ: Yeah. Those were quite the days Then, that was in 1903, I believe. We lived in Meeker there. We left in the spring of 1909 with two teams and a covered wagon with Father, Mother, Howard, George and I, and Kathleen. My brother Bill, he didn't go. Immigrated clear up into northwestern Idaho with two teams and covered wagons and one saddle horse. I remember things that happened relatively like it was yesterday. Things that happened a few years ago, I can't remember, but I remember all about that.

We went over Douglas Mountain through Craig and Rock Springs. My dad was driving Frog, he was in the lead, he and Mother. Us kids would ride in the second covered wagon, drive it. Brownie was kind of a bronc. He got to acting up in the harness and upset the wagon. Mother and Father jumped out; the wagon rolled down through the quaking asp, tore the wheels off the wagon, the tongue and breech out of it. The little furniture that my mother had was kicked around. Knocked off the shotgun. Well, we stayed there about three days before Father made a new breech, a new tongue for the wagon. In those days, all they had was a drill knife, a saw, a hammer, maybe a few nails. People could do things in those days.

Well, then we took off for Rock Springs. The three of us boys had sixteen guns between us. There was lots of sage chickens and lots of rabbits and lots of fish. We would kill them sage chickens. My mother would fry them on the campfire, had to bake bread three times a day in a Dutch oven. Fix fish or sage chicken, whatever we had, and make a lot of gravy over the fries, you know. It wasn't a bad living. We got into Rock Springs and camped out in the greasewoods on the south side of Rock Springs.

Howard, he would have been about five and a half, no, 1909, I was twelve and Howard was about fifteen and a half. But he went into town and never come home that night. Father and Mother were worried about him. They got up in the morning. See, we would hobble the horses out and put a bell on them so we could find them the next morning. I went down and found the horses, brought them up and fed them their grain, harnessed them up, and we waited and waited and waited. Father said, "Howard must've caught a freight train and took off." He was a tough kid, really, a tough kid. He smoked cigarettes. Made the biggest mess in the county. He wasn't afraid of nobody.

Well, we was just about ready to go. We had sold our home there in Meeker for \$500, just a log cabin home, and Father put that in an old trunk with brass hinges. He got that out and counted the \$500 to see if Howard had taken some money. He sat there on the wagon wheel and counted that. We had spent \$5 between Meeker and Rock Springs. There was nothing to buy,

maybe a little hay or oats. Maybe a sack of oats for a dollar. There was \$495 left. We was about to pull out, Mother was crying and my sister was a-crying. They both missed Howard. Father figured he caught a freight train and took off somewhere. About the time we started out, here he come riding behind some old guy. He went into Rock Springs and took up with some old bachelor and was riding up behind his horse.

We crossed the pass there at Green River. Green River was a division point. A lot of Indians pitched up there on the grass. Our horses had never seen trains or an Indian. So we had a time with them crossing that pass. We got across, and we'd make, oh, probably about twenty miles a day and sometimes we'd have to carry water in the barrel on the side of the wagon. Like I say, Mother would cook three meals a day in the campfire. Make biscuits every meal. My father helped her quite a bit. He would come to good pasture, us kids would fish. We would fry the fish. It wasn't a bad living. We really enjoyed ourselves. All those guns and shooting.

Smith: Were the winters hard? Wasn't it hard living out?

Russ: This is summer.

Smith: Did you ever live out in the winter?

Russ: Yeah, I'll tell you about that later. We got clear up into northwestern Idaho on an Indian reservation and wintered there. Father was kind of a traveler, he liked to go. Then we left there and immigrated back into Wyoming. The next year, we was going across the Red Desert there along July or August and it was awful hot. Ma had to sit up there with no tarp in the front seat with Dad. Us kids didn't mind it.

We camped out on the south side of Rawlins on the 4th of July and had a rodeo there. We took in the rodeo. I remember old Charley Erwin. He used to be a good steer roper. He was a big fellow, 250 pounds, riding a little black horse. Remember that name, King Barrett. He was a young cowboy calf roper. He turned out to be a world-famous calf roper. He worked in calf roping.

Then we moved over to Saratoga, moved down below Saratoga about twenty miles, along an old coal mine. This was during Depression times. Everything was cheap. You could buy a pair of Levis for ninety-five cents or a shirt for fifty cents.

MB: Times have changed.

Russ: My father handed me \$50, we went into Saratoga and bought \$50 worth of staple groceries: salt, sugar, flour — staple goods. No milk, no butter, nothing like that. Us kids hunted rabbits every day, cottontail rabbits. We killed as many as fifteen or sixteen a day. There was a lot of wild currants on the river. Mother put up currant jelly in whatever she could find, jars. She fried these rabbits, fixed a pot of gravy and a pan full of biscuits, currant jelly and coffee. That was our whole meal. You couldn't make any money, just working in the coal mines. Maybe two or three dollars a day. Times were rough.

MB: About when was that when you were at the coal mine?

Russ: 1910. We lived in Saratoga a couple of years and then Father decided he wanted to go. So, we took off again with two teams and covered wagons and crossed the mountain there at the commercial forest and come down to Schrader Creek. It was high, had to ford it. One of the horses got down in the creek and almost drowned. But we got across all right. Then we went down to Craig and Meeker.

This one horse that we had was raised about halfway between Meeker and Craig. We had been gone then about three or four years. All the trip up through Idaho and around back up in there. We camped about ten miles from where this horse had been raised. We hobbled the horses out at night and put a bell on them. The next morning this horse was gone. So, Father got on his saddle horse and followed him. He was standing down there at the gate where he was born. It had been years. It's instinct for horses and cats and dogs to go back where they're born.

Well, then we went on down through Meeker and Rifle and got down almost into Grand Junction. A country road job had come, so we stopped there and pitched a tent on a sidehill in the hot sun. Jesus Christ, I remember Mother suffered. Put two teams and scrapers to work. Two dollars a day for man and a team, that's ten hours, too. We worked there a couple of weeks until the job ended and got the road completed. The county didn't have any money left to pay us, so they issued us script until the taxes come in the fall of the year. Well, Father went down to the bank and to the grocery store and discounted that script ten percent to get a little money to go on with. So, that come to about \$1.85 a day and Mother living in that tent in the hot sun, cooking and having to haul her own water.

Smith: Is that how everybody lived?

Russ: Most of 'em. Those were tough times. Well, we started on to go to Old Mexico and got down about halfway between Grand Junction and Montrose, Colorado. We had an old black horse. He'd get the cholic and lay down in the harness. He had the cholic and laid down in the harness; Father had given him some medicine and got him up on his feet and said, "I'm going back." We turned right around in the road and went back to Rifle, Colorado, and lived there in a tent all winter. Father put up a wall tent and boarded up the sides, you know, and put in a floor. He and Mother and Kathleen slept in there. We had an old cook stove and we boys slept in the teepee tent.

Smith: Did any wild animals ever nab you?

Russ: No, but we killed them. We killed deer, antelope, elk, rabbits, caught fish.

MB: Was that cold sleeping in that teepee in the winter?

Russ: Yeah, it was pretty cold.

Smith: What did you have to sleep with, blankets or what? Did you have sleeping bags in those days?

Russ: We used old camp beds like my old camp bed over there. See, we didn't have woolen clothes like we have nowadays. But kids were tough and we didn't mind it. Two horse traders

came in one night and camped there. One of them showed me a gold watch, a twenty-three-jewel special. Being a kid, I wanted that watch right now. He said, "What have you got to trade?" I said, "A pair of boots, a six-shooter, a little money and a fishing outfit." Howard, he had a little money and another six-shooter or so. We traded everything we had for that damn watch. (Laughter) They left about daylight the next morning. It's a good thing they did 'cause I think Father would have killed them if he'd found out. The watch wouldn't run, but it was a good-looking son-of-a-gun, though.

MB: Do you still have it?

Russ: Oh, no. I took it out to a jeweler and I never will forget: I walked into the jewelry store and the old jeweler was sitting there looking through one of them things you hold up to the eye at another watch. He looked up and said, "What do you have?" I said, "Can you repair watches?" "Yep." I said, "My watch won't run." He took a look at it and started to laugh. He said, "Where did you get that?" I said, "I traded for it." He said, "You know how much they're worth?" I said, "No." He said, "They retail for about fifty cents apiece." (Laughter)

MB: You got took!

Russ: Oh, boy, them sons-of-bitches took me, I'll tell you. They pulled out about daylight the next morning. They were crooks.

Then we moved back to Saratoga in the spring time. I was married in 1918. We lived on a little ranch about ten miles out of Jack Creek from Christmas morning until the spring of 1919. Then we moved over on a ranch sixty miles north of Rawlins. I left Saratoga with about twenty-five to thirty head of cattle, my saddle horse, my chaps, my Colt six-shooter. I got down to Saddlegrants the first day. Stayed there all night, then made Ft. Steele on the railroad the next day. Put the cattle in the stockyards there, put in some hay, and I slept in the manger all night. Took off the next morning.

It was about sixty miles from Saratoga to Boot Ranch. But if you go cross country, it's probably only about forty. I was going cross country. In the spring there wasn't much feed for them, but I just let them mosey along and eat what little grass they could, all day long. While they were eating, I got to wondering where in the hell I was going to stay because we was out in the country. No ranches, no people, no nothing. I thought, "Well, I'll just have to lay out and get something to eat." I come around the end of Haystack Mountain and I see a sheep wagon. I rode over there and it was a good wagon, belonged to Annie Nelson, had food in it, everything, good bed. There was some hay, fed my cattle, fed my horse, cooked me up a good meal and stayed all night with the sheep herder. Boy, talk about luck.

Smith: What was the name of the person that owned it?

Russ: Annie Nelson. She was a good woman with extra wagons she had out there.

Smith: Did you ever fight Indians?

Russ: Oh, no.

Smith: Did you ever run into a lot of Indians?

Russ: No. I remember one of the Utes that come to Meeker one time that run away from the Ute Reservation here that camped in Meeker for two or three days. They had to round them up and get them back on the reservation in Utah. Fighting Indians was before my time.

Well, we was getting along fine on the Boot Ranch. Built up about seventy-five head of cattle, sixty head of sheep, and about four dozen Plymouth Rock chickens. Had eight horses, two sets of harnesses, two or three saddle horses. But me and my wife couldn't get along. I batched there two winters while she was teaching school.

Smith: What was her name?

Russ: Anna Hunter. The first winter I just about froze to death. I know I slept in that old house when it was twenty degrees below zero. Man it was cold. That wind would blow. It was an awful bad winter. I cut wood all winter long to keep from freezing to death. But we wore woolen underwear then. We'd send to Idaho and get woolen underwear. We was out every day in the storms, trapping and feeding cattle. I did quite a lot of trapping and herding cows. I didn't mind it, you get used to it. I'd eat a lot of fat meat. I'd butcher a mutton, and I'd eat that fat just like it was eating a burger. That's good for you to stand the cold. But I know I sat in that old house at twenty below zero.

We had a sourdough jug. Sometimes it gets awful wild, you know. It boils over, that's when it's the best, when it gets wild. We set that jug in a dishpan on the table and that son-of-a-bitch would run over at night, you know, in there. But, boy, talk about good hotcakes! I never will forget those hotcakes, how good they were. In those days, I could eat about thirty and about half a dozen eggs.

Well, we had a good start, a darn good start. We couldn't get along, so we rode away from there and finally wound up in a divorce and broke. So, I caught a freight train out of Rawlins, Wyoming, in February. It was awful cold in Rawlins, awful cold.

I rode this boxcar headed for Elko, Nevada. There was nice weather there, 'course, I had took off some of my heavy clothes. Laid around two or three days, and went into a saloon and the bartender told me that a man out in a lower valley wanted to hire a ranch hand, didn't know what day he'd be in. So I waited and he come in. He was an old fellow, sixty-three years old, weighed about 120 pounds. Oh, he turned out to be the best guy you ever seen. He questioned me to see if I knew how to do any ranch work. I said, "I sure do. I was practically raised on a ranch. I know how to feed cattle, how to band them, everything." Well, he said, "We're going away. Some pay \$40 a month and I pay \$50."

On the way out he told me, "Well, the way I got my start, I worked for cow outfits for \$40 a month for ten years and I never lost a day." I said, "Well, were you ever sick or didn't you ever lay off to go to town to buy your clothes?" "No," he said, "I was never sick. When we'd ship the beef in the fall, I'd buy my boots and Levis." And I found out that was the truth. But he was one hell of a good guy and had quite an ambition.

We got out there and he had three or four other hands. He had about 1500 head of white-faced cattle, two ranches, one there in Lamoyle Valley and one down on the Humboldt River. We got up next morning and he said, "You go with me today." So we hooked a big team on the

hayrack, threw in a couple of forks, come down to three, four, five hundred head of cattle. He liked to work me to death by about 2 pm. Talk about a worker! But a hell of a nice guy.

I worked for him for two months. He came out one Friday afternoon. He said, "I'm going to town tomorrow. Do you want to go in and put your money in the bank?" "No," I said, "I want to quit, Mr. Clubine. I want to go to California." He says, "All right. I'll take you in the morning and pay you." So, we got up the next morning. I got up just as usual, was up doing chores, cleaning out the barn and milking the cows, you know, and water for the horses. He brought my check out. He said, "If you ever come here again and want a job, you got one. You're the first man I ever fired or ever quit that got up the next morning and helped do chores." He was really a nice guy.

After I come to Vernal here, I was reading the obituaries in the Salt Lake paper and I seen a picture of him. Eighty-six years old, Charley Clubine died, of Elko, Nevada. Eighty-six years old. He was really a nice guy.

Smith: So, did you go to California?

Russ: Yeah, I went on the bum for a year.

MB: Where did you go in California?

Russ: Went way up in northern California and then wound up in Los Angeles. I was working up there wheeling cement for \$2 a day, up in northern California. A guy come along in a Model T Ford and he talked me into going to Los Angeles with him.

Smith: Was that the first car you had ridden in?

Russ: No.

Smith: What was the first car you rode in?

Russ: Well, I had two Fords when I was on the Boot Ranch. 'Course I lost everything, flat broke from a helluva nice start in life. We started out for California, got down between Los Angeles and San Francisco. See, a Model T had three bands: a low, in-between, and a high band. We burned out the brakes, so we took the reverse band out and put it in for the brake band. Then we wore it out, but he was a mechanic and had a little build-on, so he took that little build-on and made a band and put it in that Model T Ford and we got into Los Angeles.

In those days you had to carry a bed in order to get a job. I had a good bed, a damn good bed. I gave \$16 for a tarp in Reno. Couldn't get a job in Los Angeles, nowhere. So, I started out of there, going back to Reno. Pawned this bed for \$5 to a Jew there in Pasadena. I started walking out of Los Angeles. Walked out about ten or fifteen miles. See, in those days, everybody would pick you up if you was walking. Anybody come along would pick you up. Finally, a big truck come along. He slowed down and kept looking back at me and finally he stopped. I went up there and got in the cab with him. He said, "You look pretty good. That's why I gave you a ride. It's kind of dangerous picking up these hitchhikers. I'm only going up to Socker, it's thirty-five miles in the mountains." So, I went that far with him and got there just about dark.

I went over and got in a boxcar. Train was pulling out to go. Another guy was in there, so we rode in that boxcar all night. He told me, "When we get into Mojave, we want to be sure and get off when the train is still going. Being a runaway, he'll give you thirty days on the road gang for being a bum." So, my gosh, we both went to sleep in that boxcar and got into Mojave. First thing I know the train stopped, fellow says, "Come on! Come on! Get out of there, get down!" I got down and there was this big... Called him Mojave Red, great big son-of-a-bitch, red-headed cop. "Get down! Where are you going?" We told him we was going to Bakersfield. I wanted to go to Reno and this other guy wanted to go to Bakersfield to work in the grapes. "Well," he says, "As fair as I can come down is: come to the city and pay your fares now or I'll throw you in jail and give you thirty days on a road job." Well, I had a couple of dollars left out of this five dollars I got out of my bed and I could pay my fare.

He took us around the train and took us over to the highway. He says, "I'll let you fellows go if you get out of the yards. If I catch you in the yards again, I'll throw you in." We walked down the road a ways and there was a chili parlor. You get a big bowl of chili like that and all the crackers you can eat for a dime. Two doughnuts and a cup of coffee for a nickel. We ate a bowl of chili and went on up there and caught the same train we went out on. (Laughter)

MB: That's service!

Russ: Well, I got back to Reno and got a job there. Worked there five years and that's where I met my good wife.

Mrs. Montgomery: Not Reno, Floriston.

Russ: Floriston, yeah. About twenty miles out of Reno.

Mrs. Montgomery: Floriston, California, twenty-two miles from Reno. Nothing there, only some company houses.

Smith: What was Grandma doing there?

Russ: She was working in a store.

Mrs. Montgomery: Oh, you was there before I came.

Russ: Oh yeah, I was there five years. I got a five-year service pin.

Smith: What year did you meet Grandma?

Russ: Oh, it must have been '27, wasn't it, Mama?

Mrs. Montgomery: I think it was '26, then I went back to Orinville. Then I went out there again in '27.

Russ: We was married in Reno, raised nine kids.

Mrs. Montgomery: They want to hear about the early days in Vernal. That's what they came for.

MB: This is good. This is great.

Mrs. Montgomery: Well, tell them what you did in Vernal.

Russ: The mill closed down in Floriston and I sent Mother, Jack and Jim to Los Angeles. I went down there and worked in Boulder City wiring houses for seventy-five cents an hour. Worked there a couple of weeks and this guy paid everybody off. The Yuma Reservation was just settled. They put up little mud houses in Yuma City. They wanted to weed out these agitators that was causing this trouble. I went out there twice, tried to get my job back, but the boss wasn't there. So, I got my stuff and pulled out for Wyoming. Oh, boy, talk about hot weather! I cut a clipping out of the Las Vegas paper and I still got it. The average temperature for the month of July was 111 degrees. That wasn't in the city of Las Vegas, that was down in the canyon where they built the dam, see, it was hotter down there. Women and kids were there in tents. They were building Boulder Dam. Every day we would hear the ambulance coming three or four times a day taking heat victims into Las Vegas.

MB: Was there a lot of labor problems in those days?

Russ: Yeah.

MB: Were you a Wobblie?

Russ: No.

MB: Did you know any?

Russ: I knew one son-of-a-bitch. I know what he came for, he told me. When I was working there in Floriston, I got acquainted with this guy. He had been there a month or so and told me, "I'm from the IWW [Industrial Workers of the World] and I was sent here to disrupt things, to throw a wrench into the machinery." He told me that. I remember we had a big Uniflo engine to generate electricity.

Mrs. Montgomery: See, he worked in this paper mill engine room, that made paper. A paper company. He worked in the engine room and that's where he got his experience. Oh, then you took a course.

Russ: A correspondence course. But I believe he's the one who put the Uniflo engine on the bomb. It went out and our boss thought we done something to it. I know this IWW guy threw something in there.

MB: He sabotaged the equipment?

Russ: Yeah, he told me that's what he was there for, to disrupt things.

MB: Did you like the Wobblies?

Russ: No, I didn't. IWW: I Won't Work.

Mrs. Montgomery: Yeah, that's what they used to call them: I Won't Work.

Russ: Well, we took off for Wyoming. We had a 1928 Chevrolet touring car. Grandma was in Las Vegas, her and Jack and Jim. No, Los Angeles.

Mrs. Montgomery: I was never in Las Vegas; there was never any place to live.

Russ: I traded that 1928 Chevrolet off for a Model T Ford and 150 steel traps and I started trapping coyotes. The first week I caught thirty and sold them to Sammy Doan in Rock Springs for \$5 apiece. Well, that was a lot of money, \$150, you know. This old Model T was a touring car, so I cut the front end off and took and wrapped a canvas around and made a cab out of it. No heater, the radiator leaked, had to carry five gallons of water in the seat beside me. We trapped all winter with that old car. It had Tutzel gearing. You could put on chains and go through bad roads and snow. We got by. We got our house rent-free, our meat free, our water free, and our fuel free.

MB: What else did you get free?

Russ: Well, sometimes I would kill an antelope for meat. Sometimes I'd catch a big fat lamb in a trap and we'd butcher him. If we'd stayed in Los Angeles, we'd been in the bread lines. Sure as the world, we'd been in the bread lines.

MB: In the what?

Russ: In the bread lines.

Mrs. Montgomery: This was in the Depression. In the start of the Depression.

MB: This was around 1929, 1930?

Russ: You've got to have money, when you live in the city, for utilities and carfare and things like that. I knew how to get by in Wyoming 'cause I had lived there. I knew how to get by. Those were the best days of my life, when we lived on Bitter Creek.

MB: It was called Bitter Creek?

Russ: Bitter Creek, Wyoming. Forty miles east of Rock Springs. Lots of coyotes then. Coyotes everywhere.

Mrs. Montgomery: His brother trapped, so he trapped. Tell him about penning the coyotes, you

and Howard.

Russ: My brother and I got the idea that we could catch these coyote pups along in September when they're easy to catch. The weather was good and we'd put them in a pen and would feed them horse meat. When they got prime, toward December when they're prime, we'd pelt them and sell them. But it didn't work. Guy Rife gave us permission to kill fifty head of horses. He had a lot of horses there and he gave us permission to kill fifty head. We tried not to kill the good ones, just the small ones and old ones.

There was an old Fort McKley, on the old Mormon Trail about twenty miles south of Bitter Creek, an old log fort. We got some screen wire and put over the windows and the doors and put about 150 coyotes in there. Any time you'd come anywhere near there, they'd all pile in one bunch, get on top of one another. Well, it got the fur all messed up. The fur is what put them in there. We made a lucky sale. Sold them for \$7.28 average to a young fur buyer and he lost his shirt. He lost his shirt.

MB: That was three or four hundred dollars.

Russ: It was more than that. \$7.28 average for 150 coyotes. That poor devil, he lost his shirt on that deal. Took those coyotes everywhere and tried to sell them and get his money back. But he was new at the business and didn't have a stand. From then on, we would get \$11 apiece for those coyotes. When they got prime.

Well, there was another fellow there in Bitter Creek by the name of Davis, he trapped too, him and his son. Howard and I trapped. Some of our lines would go on the same roads. I come on one time going on my traps and had a coyote caught and somebody had taken him out of the trap, stole him, 'cause I looked at the tracks. I followed the tracks right down Bitter Creek where it turned off and went on down to his place. I knew he was the one who had got him. So I waited two days and figured he'd run that line again. I went around there and I had another coyote caught and I put in the trap, put a trap for him. I drove the Model T into the sagebrush and waited all day with a .253 Savage. If he'd come along and took that coyote, but I was a day too late. He didn't run it until the next day, but I didn't know this. I was going to smoke him up 'cause I was mad. I went up the next day and laid in the road for him. Him and his son came along. Well, we had it hot and heavy, I'll tell you. We calmed down. I knew he stole that coyote, but couldn't prove it. 'Course they denied it. But I got even with them a couple months later in December. I come down and he had five coyotes caught in a row. I took every one of them. (Laughter)

MB: And the traps?

Russ: Every sonofabitchin' coyote I took and the traps. I really got even with him.

Smith: Did he know it was you?

Russ: Yeah, he told Howard he knew it was me. I really got even with that guy. Well, we went back to California and worked for the paper mill for another year. Then it was shut down. That's when I went to Las Vegas. Set up on the lawn there in Las Vegas, broke. Worked there a couple weeks, went out and bought me a new trap.

Then we ended up in Saratoga. I had Jack and Jimmy and Edith. I was going up to work for a rancher who put up a lot of hay for a dollar a day. I stopped up at a friend of mine that put up about 850 ton of hay. Good alfalfa and clover hay. He said, "I'll give you \$1.25 if you'll stay and help me." So, I stayed and helped him and I was there just about a month. It rains quite a bit up there and you can't hay. So, we had to go a little bit with no pay and I had to go fishing. I was there just about a month and my check was \$20.50. That was ten hours work in the field, plus about an hour in the morning and an hour after supper. Actually, them hours right in the field. Ten cents an hour.

MB: How much was hay going for a ton then?

Russ: He couldn't afford to pay me any more than that. He sold that hay that year, 850 tons, threw in the pasture, for \$5 a ton.

MB: Five bucks a ton!

Russ: George Banks over in Rawlins had a bunch of cattle over there. He couldn't afford to pay me more. But I gave him a good day's work. A lot of these sonofabitching kids here won't do nothing like we used to. Well, we come to Vernal in 1934 and I rented an old building, just one big room, an old hall. We lived in there. Had a water tap. I built a little cupboard, run some boards and Mother made some curtains to hang across it. Carried the slop to the outside toilet. We lived there five years until I got on my feet and got some money ahead.

Smith: Was that over there by the liquor store?

Russ: No, it was up there where Ashton's is now. Right there. I had a warehouse across the street that I kept my hides and pelts in, things like that.

MB: Were you in the fur business when you first got here?

Russ: Yes. Absolutely.

MB: Did you have a good start or a rough start?

Russ: Rough start. I didn't have any money that amounted to anything. I had \$500 in a money belt around my belly that I sold my home for in Saratoga. Pretty nice home for \$500. Picture shows were thirteen cents and we didn't go 'cause we couldn't afford it at thirteen cents. And now it costs over \$2 to see a damn cheap movie.

MB: Who had the picture show then?

Russ: Different ones. I think these Shiner boys. The Shiner boys owned one show. Those were tough times.

Smith: Didn't you use to live over by the liquor store? Didn't you have a house there?

Mrs. Montgomery: No, we lived there in town where Ashton's is. Where the parking lot is. You know that little liquor store that was there? We lived in there, in that building, the Odd Fellows Building, I guess, 'cause they had their meetings upstairs. Then we had a winter house across the street in a tin building over where Doug Ross is.

Russ: To show you how tough times were, ninety percent of Naples was on relief at \$40 a month WPA work.

MB: They were on relief?

Russ: Forty dollars a month, ninety percent of Naples.

MB: What kind of work did they do on WPA?

Russ: They was supposed to dig water lines and sewer lines and things like that. But they would tell them not to work because the job would be put out. Oscar Lyman and I went out to Salt Lake and rode a load of cow hides one time. There was a water line going to each side of Park City and about 200 or 300 men there, digging some kind of water line or something. Of all them men, only two people working. Some were standing around the fire, some leaning on their shovels, some sitting around when they'd tell them not to work so the job would last. Just a handout to keep people from starving. Forty dollars a month.

MB: What else happened during those times?

Russ: Well, a lot of people would come in and pawn their hat for fifty cents or belt for fifty cents, their rifle for \$10, a six-shooter for \$5 or a watch for \$5. To operate a pawn business, you've got to have a license and a license cost \$350. So, the way I got around it, I'd write out a sales note: "Sold to Vernal Hide and Fur Company, one .30-30 rifle, serial number so-and-so," for the amount I was loaning them plus a good interest, then tell them they could come and get it in thirty days. Well, by fall deer hunting season, I'd have twenty-five or thirty rifles. I'd sell every one of them at a good profit and right after deer season, they'd start bringing them back to me. I'd loan money on them again until next year.

MB: You must've had a lot of cash.

Russ: I only had \$500 cash. Mr. Meagher at the Bank of Vernal is the one that helped me. He'd loan me \$400 for three days at one dollar interest.

MB: He was good to you.

Russ: Many times he did that.

MB: Were you good friends?

Russ: Yes. He was Irish and I'm Irish. When I got on my feet in four or five years, I had \$22,000 in the bank. I wanted to buy wool, so I went to him and told him I wanted to buy wool, but didn't want to start unless I could finance it. He said, "You go ahead and spend what money you've got and what the bank can loan you legally." The legal amount the bank could loan then was \$15,000. Now it's probably \$100,000 or \$200,000.

I used my money up, then what the bank could loan, then I used his money. I bought a lot of wool and made a lot of money. He never came to me once to check on me. If you was ambitious and honest, that man would go the limit with you. If you was dishonest or tried to cheat him, boy, he'd tear you apart. He was a good man.

I owed the bank and him \$56,000 when I got through buying wool. I sold the wool. The only thing he ever said to me was one morning he called me over and told me, "Don't jeopardize my funds and the bank's funds by speculating." That was good advice. I wasn't speculating, I knew what I was going to get for the wool when I bought it. But it was good advice.

MB: Did you ever buy any stolen wool?

Russ: Yeah.

MB: Could you tell me about that?

Russ: I bought two or three bags one time from an Indian. Come to \$200. I shipped it and paid the Indian for it. Two or three months later, here come the sheriff and the prosecuting attorney, and the sheep man who had owned the sheep, by the name of Smith. So, I told the truth about it. They asked where the wool was at and I told them it was back in Boston. It was shipped.

"There's no good to arrest me, 'cause I haven't done anything illegal," I said. "I think I can get the money back for you if you give me time."

So, every time I saw that Indian I told him he was going to go to the penitentiary. It must've scared him pretty much 'cause one day he came in and handed me two, one-hundred dollar bills. So, I mailed them to the man out in Heber City. His name was Levi Smith. So, they got their money back.

MB: Did you ever send anyone to the penitentiary? Did anyone ever go?

Russ: Well, there was one kid. I don't know if he ever went to the pen or not. I had my son by my first marriage here, born in 1919 in Saratoga. He took up with a big kid, a strange kid about sixteen or seventeen years old. That was about his age. I told him one day, he was buying him a hamburger, I said, "You don't know that kid. He might be all right or he might not. He might be a crook." Clinton said, "He's a good kid."

Well, I sent Clinton to Craig one day with a load of wool and this kid went along. When he come back, this kid wasn't with him. I said, "Where's the kid?" "He stayed in Craig." "Where's my purse?" "I lost it."

Well, two or three nights later my wife and I was up here at the café and this kid got off the bus, had a big, expensive camera hanging on his shoulder. He stole Clinton's purse and my checkbook out of the cab. He forged quite a few checks in Craig and in Salt Lake City, had signed my name, used a phony address over on 29th North or something like that. It didn't cost

me nothing. I was in Salt Lake two or three months later and I went into the detective's office to inquire whether or not they found the guy who stole the checkbook. And there my checkbook was, laying on the desk. I recognized it, so I asked the detective, I said, "You find my checkbook?" He said, "Yeah, we found it in a stolen car down here in Murray."

MB: How much money did he write on your checks?

Russ: Several hundred dollars. What he'd do is maybe buy a hundred-dollar camera or a hundred-dollar saxophone, charge it or pay with the check and then sell it for cash. It was a pretty good business. They convicted him, but I don't know what they give him, whether he went to the pen or to jail or what.

MB: Were there a lot of foreigners that had sheep running around here during the Depression?

Russ: There were quite a few Greeks.

MB: Greeks. What happened to them?

Russ: Well, most of them has gone out of business. Some of them are still left. Greeks and Basques. Good sheep men.

Smith: Remember that story you told me about the Indian who laid down between two fires?

Russ: That's just an Indian story.

MB: I'd like to hear that.

Russ: North of Roosevelt, Utah, was an Indian lake, Cedar View Reservoir, a man-made lake. Indians stock it and they used to go up there fishing a lot in the summer, in the fall, and they go up there and drive out on the ice. Well, once a week I'd take a load of wood in my jeep and go up there and drive out on the ice, cut some holes, build a fire, and fish all day. One day I caught my limit. It was a lot of fun. People thought I was crazy. "How do you keep warm? Don't you get cold?" I said, "Jesus Christ, no. I got a fire on." They thought I was crazy, but I was having more fun than anybody.

Well, this story about this Indian goes to Cedar View. The Indians claim that an Indian went and killed himself, fifty, sixty years ago. He shot himself and then built two fires and laid down between them and burnt himself up. They claim you can see the ghost of Cedar View sometimes.

I camped up there nine days in my old trailer with my bird dog, all alone. Every night after supper we'd walk the road maybe a mile or two with a flashlight and I'd shut it off. The dog, he'd run off in the sagebrush. You could see deers' eyes looking at us. Never did see the ghost.

But I was fishing there one day and I was cleaning my fish. I stepped down like this, cleaning fish there, and somebody says, "How's the fishing?" I looked up and seen a man standing across the stream. I says, "Good," and I ducked down again, cleaning my fish. "How's

the fishing?" I looked up and he was gone. I couldn't figure out where the hell he went. I couldn't see him nowhere, and couldn't see a place where he could hide. So, I wanted a keg of water for the camp and I got in the jeep and drove down the road he'd have to walk to get out of there. I didn't see that guy.

MB: Which lake was this at?

Russ: Cedar View Reservoir. North of Roosevelt. Whether that was the ghost of Cedar View, I don't know, but he disappeared like one. I couldn't figure out where he went.

MB: Do you know some of the other legends around here?

Russ: Oh, yeah, there are a lot of legends.

MB: Can you tell me some of them? No one I talk to seems to know about them.

Russ: I can tell you a true story. I was running the Boot Ranch, sixty miles north of Rawlins. I was a-batching. Two years, in November, I took a team and a wagon and a saddle horse and a guy with me. See, the deer would winter up in the mountains, then they'd come down in what they called the Pothole country, along the north side of the river, for winter range, the forest down there. I went over there two years and killed seven deer each year and brought them home for winter meat.

The first year I went in there, I had to go down a steep hill and follow the road down to an old cabin where an outlaw had hid out for a couple of years. This team I had was kind of skittish and they got to bucking up and upset the wagon. Fell down in a snowbank, wind would blow the snow there maybe ten feet deep. The wagon and guns and bedding, everything rolled out. I got out and caught the team, got the wagon box back on. Got straightened out and went on down to this cabin.

An outlaw had lived down there for a couple of years. The law got next to him; he lived off the sheep camps for his meat. He killed a man back in Missouri and he was evading the draft. He had a little bunk built in the cabin, just as big as this room here, with a dirt floor, a window and a door, but no stove. Well, in November it's cold in the mountains, so we built a bed right down on the floor and built a fire on it. He had a little bunk made out of small quaking asp. This sheriff and two guys I knew, one Charley Grundy, and one a coyote trapper, the sheriff deputized them to go help him capture this guy.

Well, the ID Ranch was about fifteen miles from there. So, they went off to the ID Ranch and decided they would wait until about daylight when he'd come out of the cabin and they'd grab him. I guess they got cold and got going about two or three in the morning to go in and capture him. So they sneaked up to the cabin and he started shooting at them.

He shot Charley Grundy through the ear and this coyote trapper blew one of his fingers off. They shot him in the chest, overpowered him, and handcuffed him, rode him on a horse, and took him down to the ID Ranch, put him in a truck, and took him down to Rawlins. Old Doc Barber, he had it in for draft evaders. He operated on him and took that bullet out of his chest without giving him any anesthetic. Don't know if that is true or not, but that's the story. The kid was in Rawlins State Prison a couple months, then they took him back to Missouri and hung him.

Well, the first trip I was in there, we got up about daylight and cooked some breakfast. I went that way and the other fellow went [the other] way. I killed three deer about noon, gutted them out, hoofed it into camp with the livers. Cooked up a good meal with hot liver, fried potatoes, coffee, and he never showed up. I waited and waited and it got damn near dark. I'd go out and holler and you could hear my echo three or four times. I'd shoot and you could hear my echo. No response.

So, about ten or eleven at night, I come to the top of a big hill right behind the cabin. Took a little ax, cut some wood, and built a fire. I figured if he was lost, he could see that fire and come to it. He never showed up, so I went back and got in bed. I remember I got a bad headache from breathing the smoke from that campfire that I had built on the hill.

I got up about daylight the next morning, cooked me some breakfast, made some coffee, made some sandwiches, and started to track him, 'cause I could track him easily in three or four inches of snow, could see his tracks easy. I forgot my gloves, so I went back to get my gloves and just then he walked in. His hands freezed all night. He laid out in a draw about a quarter of a mile from there, just over the hill. He said he never heard a shot or nothing. But, he had sense enough to build two fires and lay down between them to keep from freezing to death. He was lost. Then, as luck would have it, he went up the draw, instead of turning to the left. If he turned left and went off into that wild country, [we] probably never would have found him. He turned to the right and hit this draw we come down with the wagon and saw the wagon tracks. If he would have turned to the left, we never would have found him.

MB: Did you ever hear anything about the lost mines up in the mountains?

Russ: Oh, yeah. I think [in] those western magazines. I remember reading a lot about the lost mines. I think they're mostly fiction.

MB: Were there any up here in our mountains?

Russ: I don't recall any.

Smith: Wasn't your dad sheriff or something? Tell us about some of those experiences when he was a sheriff. Did he deputize you ever?

Russ: There was two young cowboys in Meeker stole some horses and went down White River. Crossed the ferry here at Ouray and he followed them with a team and buckboard down to Ouray. He talked to the Indians there and they said the white boys crossed three moons ago. He knew then he wouldn't catch up with them. He went back to Meeker and sent letters to all the different sheriffs in New Mexico and Texas and all them southern states.

These two cowboys, they were good guys, they went across the Navajo Reservation. They traded some of these horses off for Navajo blankets. They got down to Farmington, New Mexico, and camped out. They still had some of these horses left. My father wrote the brands down on these horses. One of them rode into Farmington to get some supplies, some coffee, eggs or something. The damn sheriff just happened to notice the brands on the horse he was riding, followed him down and arrested them, put them in jail.

Father went down and brought them back and put them in jail in Meeker. They give my

father a nice Navajo blanket. He never used it, never had it on a horse, just kept it. Oh, it was beautiful. They liked my dad. He was fair with them. They broke jail in Meeker one day. Father was up out of town a little ways on a mesa there. Word went out that these two cowboys had broke jail. My brother, Bill, he's seven years older than me, he went up and got my dad and they all come down. There those two were, waiting, they didn't try to get away. Anyway, they gave them a year or two in Canyon City Prison. Burt Hall homesteaded out here, an old man, sixty years old.

Smith: Did most everybody homestead around here at first?

Russ: Well, we lived there in that old building there in 1934 on Vernal Avenue. I had three trucks, two pickups and a deep truck, and they'd be about the only vehicles you'd see parked along there. You'd go down by Ashton's, they had a hitching rack there, teams tied up there, wagons, buggies, saddle horses, tied up there at the hitching rack.

MB: So, then as late as 1934 the principal transportation was still horse and buggy?

Russ: Yeah, that's right.

MB: So, you were pretty successful then, compared to most businessmen?

Russ: Oh, yeah. I was really successful. We made a lot of money. I worked hard. Worked every day, Sundays and all, nine to ten at night. My good wife, she was a good helper. She took care of the nine kids.

MB: What were some of your earliest impressions of Vernal when you first got here?

Russ: Well, we kind of took up with Vernal. People are nice. Pretty good hunting and fishing in those days. Especially good deer hunting; good fishing, too. Used to go up on Ashley Creek and catch one hundred fish on flies. Went up there a couple weeks ago, took my little grandson, Ryan. We fished quite a while and we caught one. I think that was the only one in the creek.

MB: And you got him.

Mrs. Montgomery: To tell you the truth, he wasn't too well taken up with Vernal. He was turned around. He didn't know which was north, which was south for a while.

Smith: Nobody does when they first come to Vernal.

Russ: I still am.

Mrs. Montgomery: I didn't ever get turned around. I used to say, "Let's buy a place or two for sale." "No, I've got all the real estate I want in Vernal." Now look where we would have been if we had bought some of it.

Russ: We didn't have any money then. Things were cheaper, but we didn't have any money.

MB: Nine kids, that's a big family to raise.

Smith: What year did you move to this house? The year my mother was born?

Mrs. Montgomery: We moved to Vernal in '34, October '34.

Smith: And what year did you buy this house?

Mrs. Montgomery: Oh, thirty-seven, thirty-eight years ago, November. We didn't buy it, we built it. We built this warehouse.

MB: So when was that? '39 or '40?

Mrs. Montgomery: Oh, we lived in this house. We didn't build the warehouse until three years later—three or four years later. We had a service station, Texaco Service Station, out front here.

MB: You ran that station?

Mrs. Montgomery: Um-hum.

MB: Who was Big-nose George?

Russ: Big-nose George was a character up in Wyoming. I read an article about him. 'Course I didn't know him. Old Charlie... they hung him in Cheyenne. They made a pair of shoes out of his hide. You can still see those shoes. The last time I was in Rawlins in the summertime, they had those shoes in the National Bank. Made out of Big-nose George's hide.

MB: Did you know him?

Russ: Oh no. Before my time.

Smith: They skinned him and made shoes out of him? Yuck!

MB: Have you ever got a hold of any rare furs or rare animals here in Vernal? Like a silver fox?

Russ: Oh yeah. I remember one silver fox used to be worth around \$700. And ... \$50-\$60 average for a good bunch of red fox.

MB: You know, you've been associated with game and animals just about all your life. What do you see in the future? What do you think is going to happen?

Russ: Well, last year was the first year in seventy-two years that I missed going deer hunting. My father took my brother and I, Howard, when we was about seven, eight, or nine down below

Meeker with a team, a wagon, and a saddle horse. The first year in Colorado you had to buy a license. He took us down there and we camped on Strawberry Creek. And I remember sleeping on the ground that night. I could see all kinds of animals. I could see elephants and bear all night long. The next morning I got up and the creek was running the wrong direction than what it was when I went to bed that night. I was all turned around.

My dad had some bananas and he went alone and Howard and I hunted together. Boy, we smoked up the deer on that. We had .20-.30 rifles. They'd come out three or four miles below camp, we were lost. We shot us some sage chickens. A cowboy come along and I remember he said, "You boys are pretty small to shoot such big guns." We told him we was lost and he told us, "Just come on back here, your dad's just a-waitin' for ya. Ya better get up there, he's gettin' kind a worried." So we got up there.

End.